

Today's hearing is about looking back at what happened and appropriately holding responsible those who committed horrible and wrongful acts. But as important as looking back, we also need to be focused on what is happening today.

The Coronavirus pandemic of the last 15 months has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Thankfully, we are now recovering and America is healing. We now need to turn our collective focus to the ongoing, and worsening, crisis of addiction and the resulting fatal overdoses that have killed what might be 100,000 people during the same time period of COVID-19. While COVID-19 has directly caused deaths, it has also caused so many of these deaths from overdoses. Depression, despair, isolation, and financial ruin have caused thousands of people to first try dangerous drugs and thousands of others in recovery to relapse and begin using drugs again.

I am grateful that the Committee has called this hearing to discuss some of the causes as well as some of the solutions that will be needed so there are not more parents coming before Congress to plead for action so more of our children don't die. We know that overprescribing of opioids was one of the causes of the opioid addiction. I know this firsthand as I told the Committee previously that one of my family members was the victim of overprescribing. My family member has chosen not to go public, but I will never forget the feeling of panic when my wife called me at work, told me what was happening, and to come home immediately. Because the family member was over the age of 21, we had no idea there was even a problem. That day, we got our family member into detox and thankfully, now successfully in recovery.

But too many parents do not have such a "successful" story to tell.

Today, this Committee is properly discussing the role of prescription opioids and assigning responsibility. But we must acknowledge that addiction in our country is nothing new and the problem is now growing at a frightening rate. And, we need to act immediately as addiction will continue to kill regardless of any action taken by this Committee or Congress on the Act under consideration today.

My immediate concern is what we should be doing right now to save the lives of the approximately two dozen people who will die of a fatal overdose during this hearing.

In the last four years, opioid prescriptions have been reduced by over one-third. We now have lots of places where people can bring in their unused prescriptions. The Drug Enforcement Administration is removing tons of medication through their takeback programs. And private industry is taking a big role in fighting the overdose crisis – a role that Congress should take note of and support. In my present role as a consultant, I'm working with DisposeRX who is making take-home pouches that allow people to safely dispose of pharmaceuticals without having to leave their home. I'm also involved with a company called Opioid Clinical Management which has developed technology and algorithms that can identify situations of overprescribing addictive drugs. And I'm working with a pharmaceutical company called JanOne which is focusing on finding treatments for conditions that cause severe pain and bringing to market drugs with non-addictive pain-relieving properties. These companies and others are all working toward one goal – to save lives – and they deserve Congressional support as part of our country's efforts to fight the drug overdose crisis.

There are other things we must do. We need to make sure that treatment is available for the millions of people who have an active and ongoing addiction. We need to make sure that not only is there bed

space available, we need to make certain that the treatment they receive is based on sound medical practices. We need to continue to fund research to find even more treatments, especially for addiction to stimulants for which there is no medication that is directly effective. For the 27 million people in recovery, we need to help them get housing, get jobs and feel like they are wanted and loved. Stigma is still too much a part of their lives.

We also need to increase our efforts on educating our young people about the dangers of drug use of any kind. Research has shown that 90% of adults with the disease of addiction started using illicit substances prior to the age of 18. For every dollar we invest in prevention has a financial savings of at least ten dollars, if not more. And, of course, there is no price we can put on saving them from a fatal mistake. We absolutely have to fund prevention messaging and I am proud to be a Senior Advisor to Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), one of the country's largest prevention programs reaching several hundred thousand students every year.

Finally, we need to recognize that the overwhelming and vast majority of drugs that are killing Americans today are being brought into our country illegally. The drug that is causing most of the deaths in our country today is fentanyl and its synthetic analogues. This powerful drug, ten times more potent than heroin, is flooding into our country. The most recent numbers I could find from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) show that in the three months of February, March, and April of this year, CBP seized 176,000 pounds of illicit drugs coming into our country which is about 20% higher than the same three-month period in 2020. During this fiscal year, CBP has seized more fentanyl than they did in entire 2020 fiscal year. All we have to do is look at rising death rates, especially with the vast majority of these deaths being caused by fentanyl to know that we are not interdicting a greater percent of drug flow, there are simply more illicit drugs coming into our country than ever before.

As we discuss assigning appropriate and just responsibility to opioid manufacturers, let us also work on the crisis of today and to do everything in our power today to reduce the number of people dying. Regardless of race, creed, or party, we should all be able to agree that the American people deserve nothing less.